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AUTHOR Walker, Laurence
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ABSTRACT

Following a review of the literature, a study to provide data on the interference effects of another dialect on aspects of reading performance was carried out in Newfoundland, Canada. Subjects were presented with oral reading material in standard English form and in a form which incorporated selected, validated, morphological features of grade three students in Newfoundland where a distinct dialect prevails. Significant differences favoring the standard English readings were revealed for three measures of oral reading proficiency so the interference hypothesis was not supported. The findings showed the language flexibility possessed by eight-year-old dialect speakers and pointed to the research hazards of inferring written language ability on the basis of oral performances. (Author/RB)

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NEWFOUNDLAND DIALECT INTERFERENCE IN ORAL READING

by

Dr. Laurence Walker

Assistant Professor

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Faculty of Education

Memorial University of Newfoundland

St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis that dialect differences exert an interference effect in the acquisition of literacy skills remains unproven on the basis of research into the relationship between black English and reading. Supplementary evidence was sought by studying the oral reading performance of grade three students in Newfoundland where a distinct dialect prevails. A comparison was made of oral reading performances of subjects reading standard English material and equivalent material containing validated morphological structures of the local dialect. Significant differences favouring the standard English readings were revealed for three measures of oral reading proficiency so the interference hypothesis was not supported. The findings showed the language flexibility possessed by eight-year old dialect speakers and pointed to the research hazards of inferring written language ability on the basis of oral performances.

INTRODUCTION: DIALECT AND READING

Will Rogers once said, "People who don't say "aint" aint eating so well these days." Educators today seem to believe, like Rogers, that personal prosperity is linked to manner of speech; yet, unlike the famous humorist, they associate success with the ability to use standard English rather than dialect. Reading specialists, for example, might say, "People who say "aint" aint reading so well these days."

The relationship between dialect and the successful acquisition of reading skills has been the focus of much attention in recent years. The attention stems from the fact that, in Shuy's (1973) words, ".... a large number of the children that do poorly on standardized reading tests are from minority homes - homes in which nonstandard English is commonly used (p. 4)." One hypothesis advanced to account for the low status of reading skills in many minority children, especially American Negroes, is the presence of an interference effect of a spoken dialect which deviates significantly from the standard English of school books. This hypothesis suggests that such children find learning to read a more difficult task because their oral language experience is different from the language of the materials used in the teaching of reading. These differences are semantic, syntactic and phonological so that these students are, in a sense, involved in the learning of a new variety of their language as well as in the learning of reading skills.

There is considerable theoretical support for this hypothesis in the view that sees reading as a language processing behaviour. This view emphasizes the language knowledge that the beginning reader brings to the task of learning to read, knowledge derived from his oral language environment.

Reading is not seen as a process of precise, sequential perceptions of graphic units, but rather as a cue-sampling, reconstructive activity whereby the reader predicts the structure of the written message on the basis of perceived cues and reconstructs the meaning of the message in terms of his language. The reader predicts structures and patterns of meaning partly based on his knowledge of the phonological, semantic and syntactic rules of language. The argument for dialect interference is that, if the actual written language is based on different systems of rules and patterns than the reader's prior language experiences, the predictive, reconstructive process breaks down.

However, the linguistic interference hypothesis has not won unanimous support. Weber (1973) felt that there are differences between oral language and the formal language of writing sufficient to cause problems for all beginning readers and that dialect does not add significantly to the task for groups like Negro children. Labov (1970) felt that the primary cause of the reading failure of Negro children in urban ghettos appeared to be "the conflict between the vernacular culture and the middle class culture of the classroom rather than any linguistic differences between their dialect and standard English (p. 223)." Torrey (1970) substantially supported this view. Labov (1970) accepted that there might be an indirect interference effect resulting from misunderstandings between teachers and black students and a loss of confidence in the alphabet as a systematic representation of the students' speech. Venezky and Chapman (1973), while dismissing linguistic interference as a significant factor in the acquisition of auditory processing skills, visual processing skills and comprehension skills, also conceded that there was "an enormous potential for indirect interference" resulting from teaching procedures which failed to distinguish between dialect differences and genuine reading problems (p. 69).

Baratz (1969), on the other hand, firmly supported the interference theory. She felt that important differences do exist with respect to phonology, vocabulary and grammar. She reported the results of a study to assess the interference effects of the nonstandard dialect on learning to read material in standard English. A sentence repetition test was administered to Negro and white children in grades three and five. Some of the sentences were in standard English form while others were in Negro dialect form. Both sets of sentences contained grammatical features which distinguish between black dialect and standard English. It was found that the Negro children tended to transform the standard English sentences into the structures of their own dialect and Baratz interpreted this as evidence of interference from their dialect when black children attempted to use standard English. She saw this interference as an extra barrier to be overcome by the child learning to decode in the initial stages of reading instruction. However, the evidence from her study was not direct empirical support for her contention; she inferred that if dialect interfered in one area of language performance - sentence repetition - it would likely do so in another - reading.

This kind of data has been interpreted differently by Labov et al. (1968). They concluded that the ability of Negro teenagers to transform standard English sentences into their own dialect was evidence of their comprehension of these sentences and therefore of their ability to function passively with standard English. Torrey (1970) reported that she had found that whereas second graders made dialect transformations in sentence repetition tasks, they were able to read standard English material without such changes.

Qualified support for the interference theory was provided by a study carried out by Ames, Rosen and Olson (1971). They administered the fifteen standard English sentences from Baratz' sentence repetition test as an oral

reading task to 25 black grade four students. Only four of the eight distinguishing grammatical features produced dialect transformations. The authors concluded that such oral reading miscues were a function of the graphic disparity between the standard English structure and the dialect form. When the disparity was great as in structures containing the copula, negation, "if" construction and the verb "to be," the subjects were obliged to acknowledge the standard English form. However, when the differences were less pronounced as in the case of constructions involving the possessive noun marker, plural noun marker, past verb tense marker and the third person singular verb marker, oral reading miscues were more likely to occur.

An interference effect was also suggested by a finding in Johnson's (1970) study of the relationship between oral language style and oral reading performance in grade one students. She found an inverse correlation between oral reading ability, as measured by the Gilmore Oral Reading Test, and density of black dialect usage. This was true for her total sample of children from poverty and nonpoverty backgrounds and for the nonpoverty group but not for the poverty group. This finding indicated that children who used black dialect features more frequently in their speech tended to be less proficient oral readers.

Other studies have suggested that the interference effect is not really significant. Weener (1967) used an immediate recall task with grade one children from two different socioeconomic areas. One group was from a background composed of predominantly black dialect speakers while the other was from a middle class Caucasian background. Lists of words, uttered by adult speakers from both backgrounds, were presented and the students' recall measured. It was found that the Negro students were able to perform just as well when the speaker was from a standard English background as when he was

from their own dialect community. This was interpreted as evidence that dialect speakers' language competence can extend to more formal styles without serious interference from dialect. However, the experimental task did not involve continuous discourse.

Melmed (1973) carried out a study to determine whether phonological features of black English interfered with reading at the grade three level. He found that while students who spoke black dialect had difficulty with auditory discrimination of pairs of words which are homonyms in their dialect, this difficulty did not appear to interfere with their ability to comprehend the words when they occurred in continuous written discourse. Baratz (1973) pointed out that the students in this study were all reading up to grade level and therefore not representative of all grade three children of whom those who were not reading up to grade level might be expected to be more likely to demonstrate an interference effect.

Burke (1973) discussed the question of dialect interference in the light of the work of the Reading Miscue Center at Wayne State University. She felt that the miscues in the oral reading of dialect speakers recorded at the Center did not generally overtly affect the meaning of the material whether they were due to phonological, lexical, or syntactic differences.

Evidence like that provided by these studies led Venezky (1970) to assert that "... dialect differences per se are not major barriers for learning to read (p. 341)." Baratz (1973), however, felt that the research evidence as a whole remained ambiguous and that "... there is still a crying need for adequate research on the question of dialect interference in the acquisition of reading skills (p. 109)." In a comprehensive analysis of sociolinguistic alternatives in the teaching of reading to dialect speakers, Wolfram (1970) expressed tentativeness about the issue. His analysis was predicated on

"the possible effect that dialect differences may have in the acquisition of reading skills (p. 11)." Schneider (1971), after reviewing research on the question, concluded "that deviations in a child's dialect from standard English pose serious obstacles to learning to read remains a hypothesis (p. 549)."

Thus, the question is one which has not been conclusively answered by research using black dialect speakers. The data available permit scepticism in some researchers, tentativeness in others and conviction in some others. There would seem to be some justification for continued research and some interest in attempting to address the question in a different geographical context from the one in which most of the study has been carried out.

A STUDY OF DIALECT AND READING IN NEWFOUNDLAND

A study to provide data on the interference effects of another dialect on aspects of reading performance was carried out in Newfoundland. Subjects were presented with oral reading material in standard English form and in a form which incorporated selected, validated, morphological features of their dialect and their oral reading miscues were listed and compared.

Morphology, referring to word forms, is a subset of syntax which has been identified as the "major source of difficulty (Baratz 1973, p. 107)," in this area. The study by Ames et al., (1971) found that reading errors were more likely to occur when there was greater graphic similarity between the standard English structure and its dialect equivalent. By confining the study to within-word differences, this principle of graphic similarity could be retained. There were also practical reasons for focusing upon morphology. Equivalence between the standard English and dialect reading materials was easier to achieve and it permitted the use of the word as the unit of analysis resulting in greater objectivity.

The Province of Newfoundland presents a suitable, alternative context for a dialect and reading study. There is a distinctive dialect and a concern about what appears to be a generally low level of reading achievement in many of the Province's schools.

Newfoundland, "Britain's oldest colony," became, in 1949, "Canada's newest province." Before Confederation the economy of the island depended upon the fishing industry and the great majority of the population, descended mainly from settlers from the West of England and from Ireland, lived in small, isolated outport communities scattered around the rugged coastline. There were few roads, the only communication being infrequent coastal boats. Life for the outport fisherman was hard under a harsh climate, inhospitable terrain

and a merchant oligarchy which controlled the sale of his catch in return for the bare essentials of life.

Under conditions of geographical isolation, a distinctive dialect developed in Newfoundland. It contains traces of an earlier variety of the mother tongue derived from the original speech of the early settlers. Patterson (1896) put this linguistic conservatism elegantly when he wrote, "... the rude speech of the unlettered fisherman was really part of the language of Shakespeare, Milton and Chaucer (p. 67)." He illustrated this with a quotation from the speech of a Newfoundland fisherman, "Poor John is reduced to an atomy." The word "atomy", long obsolete in standard English, once referred to a skeleton (the object of study in anatomy) and can be found in Shakespeare's Henry IV: "Thou starved bloodhound....thou atomy thou."

Story (1957) emphasized the independent development of the dialect under conditions of separation from the mother tongue when he wrote:

> Unhampered by contact with a widespread literary English, the local dialects have....retained many features of the points of origin; but, similarly untrammelled, they have also developed and changed strikingly in their local habitation (p. 351).

This independent development has marked the dialect of the island as a whole and the local dialect variations of the isolated communities within it. As a result, while there is an identifiable manner of speech which marks the overall dialect, there are also geographical variations of it in the different communities of the province. Perhaps this is one reason why the dialect has so far not been completely surveyed and analyzed.

Paddock (1966) and Noseworthy (1971) have studied the dialects of two Newfoundland communities. These studies confirmed what other linguists have discovered about the Negro dialect in the United States, namely that a dialect is a rule-governed, systematic set of speech habits which contrast in identifiable, consistent ways in terms of phonology, semantics and syntax

with standard English. It is a different rather than a deficient variety of the language.

From the studies by Paddock and Noseworthy certain morphological features of the dialects investigated can be identified tentatively. Subjectively, these features would not seem to be confined to the target communities but can be heard in varying degrees of density and consistency, in the speech of adults and children throughout the province. Thus, they would seem to be sample morphological characteristics of the general dialect of Newfoundland.

Selected Morphological Features of the Newfoundland Dialect

1.0 Pronoun Forms

1.1 Accusative we. In the Newfoundland dialect the form we occurs in the stressed accusative position as in, They dropped we off at the cove. In the unstressed accusative position the familiar us would occur.

1.2 Reflexive pronoun. In standard English the reflexive pronoun is formed by adding the suffix self to the genitive or accusative form to produce myself, yourself, himself, ourselves, themselves. In the Newfoundland dialect greater consistency is observed since the reflexive form is generated by adding self always to the genitive form. This produces two distinctive forms, hisself and theirselves, the latter sometimes being made less redundant by its realization as theirself.

2.0 Verb Forms. There are several distinctive characteristics of verbs in the Newfoundland dialect.

2.1 Present Tense Marker. There is no inflectional indication of person or number. The s inflection occurs with any subject, producing I goes, You goes, He goes, We goes, and They goes.

2.2 Past Tense Forms. The Newfoundland dialect observes a greater economy of these forms than standard English. The simple past and the past participle forms are often collapsed into one with either the simple past form surviving as in, You must be drove crazy. I was took. Oh, I'm bit! or the past participle form serves both past tense functions as in, I seen him yesterday. They done their homework.

2.3 Regularization of Strong Verbs. In standard English weak verbs form the simple past through the addition of the -d morpheme. Strong verbs undergo a change of form. In the Newfoundland dialect some strong verbs are regularized by the addition of ed rather than through a change of form. This process produces forms like throwed, rised and blowed.

2.4 "Nonpast" Forms of the Verb to be. The Newfoundland dialect possesses an additional form of the verb to be, bees, which is used in what Paddock (1966) called the "nonpast" or continuous present sense and which contrasts with the usual present tense forms am, is and are. Thus, the dialect contains the following contrasts:

I bees sick.	versus	I am sick.
It bees cold here.	versus	It is cold here.

Bees is used when the condition referred to is continuous rather than confined to the immediate present.

3.0 Gender. The Newfoundland dialect contains a wider extension of masculine and feminine gender than standard English. All nouns relating to transportation vehicles are feminine and take feminine pronoun forms; most other count nouns are masculine, while all mass nouns are neuter.

4.0 Relative Clause Marker. The relative pronoun is omitted more widely in the Newfoundland dialect than is permitted in standard English. Sentences such as the following are grammatical in the dialect: That's the man killed the moose yesterday. There's always someone comes along to grab it.

It is interesting that these morphological features are, in some cases, quite similar to distinctive characteristics of the Negro dialect. Both dialects are characterized by a greater consistency in the present tense marker system. In the Negro dialect, the s inflection is totally absent (Fasold and Wolfram, 1970), whereas in the Newfoundland dialect the s inflection is added for all subjects. The standard English marker for the third person singular appears, in comparison, to be an irregularity.

Another similarity is the past tense form of the verb. Both dialects appear to collapse the simple past and the past participle forms so that in the Negro dialect one may encounter He taken it. He have come. He done it. and He have did it (Fasold and Wolfram, 1970, p. 61-2), and in the Newfoundland dialect one would similarly find He come home yesterday. The dough has rised. She has drove since she was fifteen.

Thirdly, the invariant form be appears to be remarkably similar in function. Fasold and Wolfram (1970) refer to this form as it appears in the Negro dialect as the distributive or nontense be which indicates an intermittent state of affairs as in I be good. In the Newfoundland dialect this same form appears but with the addition of the s inflection to produce I bees good. In neither case is this simply a corruption of the standard English present tense form; it is an invariant form denoting a specific meaning.

The reasons for these similarities are not immediately clear. The greater economy of the past tense system could suggest that dialects are less sophisticated versions of a particular language, especially since these simplifications are found in the speech of young children growing up in more conventional dialects of English. However, this interpretation is not sustained by the presence of the additional form of the verb to be where the dialects demonstrate greater sophistication than standard English. Perhaps

these common features are attributable to the greater linguistic conservatism of dialects which are isolated from the mainstream of the language and thereby retain features of the original mother tongue from a time when it exerted a common mercantile influence on both Newfoundland and the plantations in the American colonies.

Design of the Study

The study set out to investigate the interference effects of a divergent oral dialect upon reading ability. Specifically, the purpose was to determine whether the oral reading performance of grade three students speaking a particular variety of the Newfoundland dialect was affected by morphological differences between this dialect and standard English. The strategy employed was to present the students with continuous oral reading material in either standard English form or in a form embodying selected morphological features of the Newfoundland dialect. A comparison between performances on these two sets of materials would indicate the presence or absence of a dialect interference effect upon oral reading.

Before data could be collected, two problems arose from the fact that Newfoundland does not constitute a completely homogeneous dialect community. The larger cities and towns have been affected in recent years by increasingly cosmopolitan influences which tend to reduce the vigour and extent of a local dialect. Thus, it was necessary to conduct the study in an area where such influences have been minimal. The island community of Twillingate was selected with this in mind. The island of Twillingate, with a population of approximately five thousand, lies in Notre Dame Bay on the Northeast coast of Newfoundland. Until 1973, when a new causeway linked it with New World Island and thence by older causeways to the mainland, the people of Twillingate depended upon a ferry to transport them across the half-mile "tickle"

separating them from the neighbouring island. Twillingate is one of the oldest communities in Newfoundland having been settled in the eighteenth century chiefly by immigrants from the West of England.

The second problem arose from the variations within the dialect of the Province caused by historical and geographical factors. The morphological features identified by Paddock (1966) and Noseworthy (1971) in two communities would not necessarily truly reflect the version of the dialect spoken in another community, Twillingate. It was thus essential to the study that an attempt be made to validate locally morphological features to be included in the treatment material.

To provide this validation, a sentence repetition task was used with a random sample of the experimental population. The eight morphological structures from the studies by Paddock (1966) and Noseworthy (1971) were incorporated into sentences. Then for each sentence containing a dialect structure, a different sentence was constructed containing the same structure in standard English form. Some structures were represented more than once. In this way, a total of twenty sentences was produced and these were then tape-recorded in random order.

Sentence Repetition Test

1. My friend from Grand Falls came to stay with me last summer.
2. My little brother throwed the ball over the fence.
3. There's the big dog that frightened the girl last night.
4. The ship was a fine sight as she sailed into the harbour.
5. John liked to do things by himself so he didn't ask for help.
6. They did it theirselves without any help from anyone else.
7. They saw us when we were picking blueberries.
8. Mike finished the work all by hisself.

9. When someone touches you, you are unfrozen and you can join in again.
10. They dropped we off at the cove and we spent the day fishing.
11. They boys worked by themselves and the girls just sat and talked.
12. In this game, when you bees tagged you bees froze.
13. Peter did well when he played for the fastball team.
14. If I has any homework, I does it before supper.
15. I threw the ball hard and he dropped it.
16. When Alan finished the exercise, the teacher said he done well.
17. The boat bumped heavily against the dock as it tied up.
18. That's the house burned down last night.
19. I go to bed later at the weekend and I stay in bed longer.
20. My brother come home yesterday from Corner Brook.

A randomly chosen sample of thirteen grade three students from Twillingate schools was administered this sentence repetition task. Their treatment of the eight morphological features in both the dialect and standard English sentences was analyzed. In each case, the structure in question could be retained and reproduced exactly as in the stimulus sentence, it could be transformed into the equivalent dialect form, it could be omitted in the reproduction or it could be transformed in an unpredictable way. Each structure was analyzed in terms of either its exact reproduction or its predictable dialect or standard English transformation. Table 1 shows the results of this analysis for each of the eight morphological features under investigation.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Table 1 shows that the morphological feature in this list which was most tenacious in the dialect of this sample was the reflexive pronoun form, realized as hisself and theirselves. In eighteen out of twenty-six cases where the standard English form was presented, the repetition was transformed into the dialect form. It was noticeable that the form theirself was preferred by several of the students. There were no transformations from the dialect to standard English. In the case of the accusative use of we and of the nonpast bees, there was no evidence that they were a part of the local dialect. The other five structures appeared to be part of the dialect, although not as strongly entrenched as the reflexive pronoun. It was noticeable in the administration of this sentence repetition task that most of the subjects used a greater proportion of standard English in their responses than they did in more informal conversation preceding and following the repetition of the sentences. Particularly was this so in the case of the present tense s inflection and the collapsing of the past tense forms. Probably the presence of a stranger in the school asking them to perform unusual tasks caused them to adjust the register of their speech towards greater formality. Whereas, when they were more relaxed, talking spontaneously, more informality with a higher density of dialect structures crept back into their speech.

Using the data from this sentence repetition task supplemented by recordings of informal conversation with the thirteen subjects, it was concluded that six of the eight morphological structures were reflected in the Twillingate dialect and that these could be incorporated into the stimulus passages for oral reading. Accusative we and the nonpast form of the verb to be were excluded.

A 118-word passage was written about the game tag, a topic familiar to most eight year olds. The readibility of this passage, as measured by the Fry Readability Graph (Fry, 1972), was at the grade one level. This ensured that

it was within the reading ability of most of the students within the sample. A dialect version of this passage was then prepared whereby each time one of the critical morphological structures appeared it was rewritten in dialect form. Thus, the words himself and themselves were rewritten as hisself and theirself and we play as we plays etc. Otherwise, no attempt was made to modify the orthography. In the preparation of the two versions of the passage, it was found that it was very difficult to incorporate all six features in a short passage without forcing the material in an unnatural, artificial manner. Consequently, only three of the six structures were present: reflexive pronouns (three examples), present tense inflectional s (seven examples), and collapsed past tense forms (six examples). Thus, the two passages were identical except for sixteen words, which in one version, were in standard English form and in the other in a form reflecting morphological rules of the Newfoundland dialect.

Oral Reading Passage: Standard English Version

At school we play a game we call tag. We play this game two ways. One way is when the girls stand by themselves and the boys run down the hill. Then the girls chase after them. When a girl touches a boy, he is frozen and he has to stand by himself. But then if a boy touches him, he is unfrozen and he can run again. When all the boys get frozen, the game is over.

The other way is like the boys played this morning. One boy was chosen to be it. The others ran away and he had to catch one of them by himself. When he did that, the boy he caught was it.

Oral Reading Passage: Dialect Version

At school we plays a game we calls tag. We plays this game two ways. One way is when the girls stands by theirself and the boys runs down the hill. Then the girls chases after them. When a girl touches a boy, he is froze and he has to stand by hisself. But then if a boy touches him, he is unfroze and he can run again. When all the boys gets froze, the game is over.

The other way is like the boys played this morning. One boy was chose to be it. The others run away and he had to catch one of them by hisself. When he done that, the boy he caught was it.

The experimental sample consisted of all the grade three students in Twillingate's two elementary schools, a total of eighty-two. The comprehension subtest of The Gates-McGinitie Primary Reading Test, Level C, was administered to all students in the sample. The raw scores from this test were used to stratify the sample into three approximately equal levels of reading achievement, high readers, middle readers, and low readers.

This stratified sample was then randomly divided, within levels, into two treatment groups, one to read the standard English passage, the other the dialect passage.

To collect the oral reading data, the students were interviewed individually in a quiet room. During this interview the oral reading of the appropriate passage was tape-recorded for later analysis. Complete data were collected from seventy of the eighty-two children. In order to match the numbers of subjects in each reading level across treatment groups, it was necessary to randomly delete some subjects from some cells so that the

final sample consisted of two cells of eight high readers, two cells of ten middle readers and two cells of twelve low readers for a total of sixty subjects, thirty in each treatment.

Analysis of the Oral Reading Protocols

The oral reading performance of each subject was analyzed using the miscue analysis system presented by Goodman and Burke (1972). Each miscue was recorded and tallied, individual words being considered the unit of analysis. Miscues consisted of substitutions, omissions of words or word parts, insertion of words or word parts, failure to pronounce words, reversal of words or word parts, and repetition of words or word parts. Hesitations were not counted as miscues and when an omission involved more than one word, it only counted as one miscue. No more than one miscue per word was counted. The following is a partial sample typescript recording.

the girls
When a girl touches a boy, he is

© hisself
frozen and he has to stand by himself.

But then if a boy touches him, he is

unfrozen and he can run again. When

all the boys get frozen, the game is over.

The marking system indicates three miscues in the first line - two substitutions and the omission of part of the word touches. There are two miscues in the second line - the omission of the final phoneme in frozen, which was then restored in a repetition of the word, and the substitution of hisself for himself. In the fourth and fifth lines, the final phoneme of frozen is omitted without an attempt to correct the miscue. The typescript contains a total of seven miscues of which four involve words which contain

dialect features being manipulated in the treatments.

From this analysis, two miscue scores were derived for each subject: a total miscue score in which all miscues were counted and a dialect miscue score which consisted of all miscues involving the sixteen words containing the morphological structures built into the passage. To be considered a dialect miscue, the change did not have to result in a dialect transformation; any miscue involving one of these words, including failures to pronounce it, counted as a dialect miscue.

To these two criterion scores was added a third measure as a dependent variable, reading time as recorded by stopwatch during the interview. Thus, the quality of the oral reading was measured in three ways: the total number of miscues, the number of dialect miscues, and the reading time.

These three criterion measures were statistically analyzed using two-way analyses of variance, treatment x reading levels.

Findings

The results of the statistical tests revealed differences between the oral reading performances of the two groups. No significant interaction effects were evident revealing that none of the three reading levels was differentially affected by the treatment. Low and middle readers were affected in the same way as high readers.

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Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

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Table 2 shows the treatment F ratios for each dependant variable. There was a difference for all three variables significant beyond the .01 level of confidence. A consistent direction of difference is shown by the means for the dialect and standard English treatment groups in Table 3. In the

case of all three measures of oral reading performance the difference favoured the standard English group. The students in this group read their passage significantly faster, with significantly fewer total miscues and significantly fewer dialect miscues than the students who read the dialect passage.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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Table 4 reveals the details behind the dialect transformations that contributed to the larger number of miscues by the group reading the dialect version. The table shows that very few dialect transformations were made by the group reading the standard English text, especially on the reflexive pronoun and present tense s inflectional structures. A very much larger number of such transformations occurred in the oral reading of the dialect group, a large proportion of the students in this group omitting the s inflection from present tense verbs and substituting himself for the written hisself. The distribution of the transformations among the three reading levels does not appear to indicate that any one level was more prone to make dialect transformations than another.

These differences are so clear-cut that one might suspect that randomization had failed to achieve balanced groups. Yet, on the basis of the reading test scores, the two were very similar in distribution of reading ability. The mean comprehension raw score of the dialect group was 14.9 with a variance of 52.7 while for the standard English group the figures were 14.6 and 40.4. If oral reading ability is closely correlated with silent reading comprehension, the differences must have been caused by the treatment variable.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings and conclusions from this study are not generalizable beyond the sample. Only one dialect variation was included in the investigation and it cannot be claimed that the relationships between oral reading and the dialect spoken by children in Twillingate are in any way representative of such relationships in other dialect communities within Newfoundland or in other dialects beyond. The data are merely descriptive of phenomena in one dialect community. As such, they may be part of the accumulation of evidence on the question of dialect interference in reading.

The grade three students in this study read aloud material in standard English form with fewer miscues and more quickly than material which contained morphological structures present in their oral dialect. This was congruent with a finding from Johnson's (1970) study of black grade one students' oral reading and with findings by Nolen (1971) and Weener (1967) that recall of black students was not facilitated by the presentation of material in dialect form. There was no evidence from this present study that dialect constitutes an interference effect on oral reading. On the contrary, a matching of reading material with features of the oral dialect impeded the oral reading performance of the sample significantly.

Also of interest was the absence of interaction effects between reading levels and treatment for any of the dependent variables. Baratz (1973) criticized Weber's (1969) study which found no evidence of interference from black dialect because less proficient readers were excluded from her sample. However, the findings from this study show no evidence that suggests that poor readers were more handicapped by dialect than average or good readers. Their performance on the oral reading task was consistent with that of the other readers.

Obviously, though, the results of this study do not speak to the question of whether these same dialect differences had interfered with the growth of reading skills in these Twillingate students during their school careers preceding the collection of data for this study. As an investigation of one aspect of reading performance at a single point in time, these results can only assert that at that point in time interference was not discernible in any simple direct form. Had the results shown that oral reading performance was facilitated by dialect material, then it could have been claimed that dialect was and, therefore, had been, a factor interfering with reading. However, with the opposite findings, interference is not proven but neither is it disproven.

Undoubtedly, the children in this study did not, on the whole, read well. Their mean scores on the standardized reading test were below grade level and many of the students found the passages difficult to read in spite of the low readability level. Dialect may have been one factor which contributed to this slow acquisition of literacy skills.

A result like this with grade three children who have had two and a half years experience with written language exclusively in standard English form is hardly surprising. During these years, their teachers had probably insisted on accurate rendition of the standard English structures as they appeared in their readers. These teachers themselves would have been, on the whole, models of standard English speech, supplementing the language models provided by television programs from the Canadian and American mainland. These experiences with non-dialect English must have helped these eight-year olds to develop some quite sophisticated intuitions about language so that they knew, intuitively, that there was a language of books and a language of talk and that, just as you don't swear at the supper table, you

don't use the language of talk when you're reading aloud from a book.

This language flexibility in dialect-speaking children is what emerges most clearly from this study. Although they spoke a dialect which contained distinctive morphological structures, the incorporation of these same structures into written material tended to confound their oral reading. Apparently, to the eight-year old, speech is one set of language registers and writing is another and he adjusts his language responses accordingly. After two years of school, he has at least two sets of responses: dialect responses when he is speaking, although these are probably variable in density depending on situation factors, and standard English responses when he is reading. When the response demands of the written material are transposed and the reader's response expectations interfered with, his oral reading falters. More interference seems to be caused by disruption of these response expectations than by the mismatch between the morphological structure of his speech and that of the writing.

This general, statistical finding was most clearly visible in the responses to the third person reflexive pronoun, himself in standard English and hisself in the dialect. The standard English structure had been transformed into hisself eighteen out of a possible twenty-six times in the sentence repetition task; yet, when the dialect form was presented in the context of written material, it was read as himself thirty-one times and as hisself only thirteen times. When himself occurred in the standard English text, it was transformed into hisself only twice. Torrey (1970) reported a similar discrepancy between performance on a sentence repetition task and oral reading in black grade two students.

This type of language flexibility means that care must be taken by researchers in generalizing about language performance in one mode on the basis

of observed performance in another. This point was made by Weener (1967) when he wrote:

> "...if the researcher intends to make inferences about a person's ability to understand a message presented in formal style, he must not be misled into conclusions based on a description of the s's informal style of speech production (p. 78-9)."

Such caution would be necessary in the interpretation made by Baratz (1969) of her sentence repetition data. She concluded that the fact that the black students in her study tended to transform standard English structures into their more familiar dialect was "evidence of interference from their dialect when black children attempt to use standard English (p. 111)." The findings of the present study strongly suggest that this interpretation may only be valid for one particular use of standard English, sentence repetition, and that the interferences may not necessarily be present in other areas of language use, namely oral reading. Further research in this area would have to acknowledge this flexible language performance.

A second research implication emphasized by this study would be the need to study beginning readers rather than subjects who have been exposed to standard English writing for a considerable time before data collection. This raises the difficult practical problem of measuring reading performance in a sample of six-year olds, for example. Perhaps one solution would be to group a sample of beginning readers according to a measure of dialect density and then compare the later reading achievement of these groups. If variables such as intelligence and socioeconomic status could be controlled, such a design might reveal the presence or absence of an interference effect in dialect speakers' acquisition of reading skills.

Table 1

Number of Retentions and Transformations

for Eight Morphological Structures

in a Sentence Repetition Task

Structure	Number of Examples in Each Form	Standard English Version		Dialect Version	
		Transformed	Retained	Transformed	Retained
1. Accusative *we*	1	0	13	3	8
2. Reflexive pronoun	2	18	8	0	13
3. Present tense Inflectional *s*	2	3	20	6	19
4. Past tense collapse	3	5	31	0	30
5. Strong Verb Regularization	1	4	9	1	11
6. Nonpast *bees*	2	0	13	0	17
7. Feminization of Nouns	1	2	10	0	10
8. Relative clause Marker Deletion	1	2	6	3	9

Table 2

Two-way Analysis of Variance Treatment Effects for Three Measures of Oral Reading Performance

Variable	df	Mean Square	F Ratio	p
Total Miscues	1	858.8	9.93	.003
Dialect Miscues	1	299.3	39.2	.000
Reading Time (seconds)	1	17035.3	7.94	.007

Table 3

Treatment Means and Variances from the Two-way Analyses of Variance for Three Measures of Oral Reading Performance (n = 30)

Variable	Standard English		Dialect	
	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance
Total Miscues	11.6	88.7	19.2	118.3
Dialect Miscues	4.0	8.0	8.5	9.8
Reading Time	103.1	1831.5	136.8	3672.9

Table 4

Number of Oral Reading Dialect Transformations

for Each Distinctive Morphological Feature

Feature	Instances	Standard English			Dialect		
		High Readers (8)	Middle Readers (10)	Low Readers (12)	High Readers (8)	Middle Readers (10)	Low Readers (12)
1. Reflexive Pronouns							
Singular	2	1	0	1	9	12	15
Plural	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
2. Past Tense Forms	6	1	8	10	5	2	12
3. Present Tense Inflections	7	0	0	1	24	15	34

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